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FM AMEMBASSY BUDAPEST
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4136
INFO RUEHZG/NATO EU COLLECTIVE
RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW 0708
RUEAWJA/DEPT OF JUSTICE WASHINGTON DC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC
RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC

C O N F I D E N T I A L BUDAPEST 000336

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DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/CE JAMIE LAMORE, PLEASE PASS TO NSC JEFF HOVENIER

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/03/2014
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [EU](#) [NATO](#) [HU](#)
SUBJECT: HUNGARIAN FOREIGN MINISTRY OFFENSIVE

Classified By: Acting P/E counsleor Jon Martinson, reasons 1.4 (b,d)

¶1. (SBU) Summary. In his intital meeting with the Charge, the new Hungarian Foreign Minister, Peter Balazs, highlighted Prime Minister Gordon Bajnai's first official international visits to the EU, NATO and Austria on April 27 as part of a "great offensive" in foreign affairs. Balazs also said he would meet soon with the Russian Foreign Minister, and placed special emphasis on improving relations with Hungary's neighbors to "clear the past and look forward." Although facing a cut in foreign development funds, Balazs underscored Hungary's continuing commitment in Afghanistan. Touching on the Guantanamo detainee, tax treaty, and tolerance issues, the Foreign Minister expressed confidence in his senior leadership team and underscored his desire to meet with the Secretary as soon as possible to present the Bajnai government's program. End summary.

¶2. (C) Charge Levine met with Foreign Minister Peter Balazs on April 30 on the heels of the Prime Minister's visit to the EU, NATO and Austria. Balazs - Hungary's first EU Commissioner and former Ambassador to Germany - commented that the Prime Minister's official visits abroad were specifically selected to underscore the "great offensive...and absolute priorities" of the Bajnai government. That said, the FM also noted that he intends to meet with Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov "as soon as possible," while giving "special attention" to Hungary's bi-lateral relationship with its seven neighbors. Commenting that Hungary has a long history with each of the seven, Balazs said he wants to start anew, putting aside those issues that attract considerable media attention but are not necessarily sensitive, stating that he has already met with his counterparts from Slovakia, Austria and Romania. Noting that, although "the EU has no mechanism towards historical reconciliation to close the past, shake hands and start anew," most of Hungary's neighbors are in the "same clubs," and the FM senses a "shared receptivenss to clear the past and start a new page" in these relationships.

¶3. (C) On Afghanistan, Balazs confirmed Hungary's continuing commitment, although noting that the inter-ministerial committee overseeing Hungarian foreign assistance development funds reduced this year's amount by five percent. (Note. This decision reduces the programmed development fund by approximately USD 150,000. End note.) Balazs said the reduction will hardly be felt in Afghanistan, and the MFA is still in discussions with Greece and Japan, as well as the EU, concerning supplemental funding from those sources to improve and enlarge Hungarian presence on the ground. He supported the shift in focus from military to civilian activities as part of the Administration's new AFPAK strategy.

¶4. (C) Expressing confidence in his reshuffled senior leadership team, Balazs said that newly appointed Senior State Secretary, Socialist MP Vilmos Szabo, will be a "valuable contributor," with his excellent relations, both in Parliament, and with neighboring countries on minority issues. The FM noted that former Senior State Secretary, Marta Feksz, will remain in the MFA as Cabinet Chief to provide consistency with a number of issues, to include the final meeting on the tax treaty schedule for the week of May 25, as well as the Embassy's property exchange program. In response to the Charge's comments related to Washington's interest in events related to intolerance in Hungary, including attacks on Roma, Balazs commented that "the Justice Ministry has a perfect profile of those who have killed the Roma...and the circle is closing in." Thanking the Charge for the offer of FBI assistance, the FM said he would pass this offer directly to the Justice Minister. However, noting intolerance towards Roma and the recent Magyar Garda demonstration, during which the group publicly denied the Holocaust, Balazs expressed concern that Hungary doesn't "underestimate the threat." (Note. Hungarian media reports May 4 stated that an FBI team will be arriving in the next few days to provide "perpatrator profiling" assistance. Embassy LEGATT is working to confirm this information. End note.)

¶5. (C) Comment. Although acknowledging that he has had minimal professional contact with the U.S., Balazs appeared professorial in demeanor, knowledgeable of the issues raised by the Charge, and very comfortable in his role as Foreign Minister. Drawing upon his observation while Ambassador that Germany "tailor-made" relationships with each of its neighbors, Balazs appears intent on establishing an important new approach to Hungary's relationships with its neighbors. The question is if he will have sufficient time to make a real difference given that the Bajnai government's one-year mandate faces serious challenges in public support as the austerity program details become clearer. Internally, Vilmos Szabo, as the MFA's Deputy Foreign Minister, brings his 2002-2006 experience as a State Secretary in the Prime Minister's for Hungarians beyond-the-borders, and a stronger Parliamentary connection, to "sell" Balazs's efforts both in Parliament and with Hungary's neighbors. We anticipate that Marta Feksz, mentioned earlier as a possible UN Ambassador, will continue to play a key role in several U.S./Hungary bilateral issues, to include a decision on acceptance of Guantanamo detainees as well as the Tancsics property transfer. The Foreign Minister reiterated his interest in meeting soon with the Secretary, and his staff asked that, as soon as possible, the Department further refine the proposed dates provided previously by Post to facilitate planning the Foreign Minister's other travels.
Levine